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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
May 25, 2010

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Mr. Erskine Bowles
The Honorable Alan Simpson
Co-Chairmen, National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform
c/o Mr. Bruce Reed
1650 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington DC 20504

Dear Mr. Bowles and Senator Simpson:

As you know from our letter to you of April 17, Jim Cooper and I have been working for nearly four years to establish a bipartisan commission to address our nation's debt crisis by examining all policy options — entitlement spending, other program spending, and tax policy — holding public hearings, and recommending to Congress a plan of action with a mandated vote.

While I would have preferred passage of H.R. 1557, the Securing America's Future Economy (SAFE) Commission Act, the president has moved forward with an executive commission and named each of you co-chairmen of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. As I write this letter today, the U.S. stock market as well as global markets are continuing a deep and downward slide. Our nation is on an unsustainable fiscal path. You know the staggering and unprecedented debt and deficit statistics. We owe nearly \$62 trillion in obligations, spend nearly \$4 billion each week solely for interest payments to service the debt, and the Congressional Budget Office projects that debt held by the public will encompass 90 percent of the gross domestic product by 2020. Many are concerned that Greece's collapse and the European debt crisis will spread to the United States.

British historian and Harvard professor Niall Ferguson wrote in the March/April 2010 edition of *Foreign Affairs*: "One day, a seemingly random piece of bad news — perhaps a negative report by a rating agency — will make the headlines during an otherwise quiet news cycle. Suddenly, it will be not just a few policy wonks who worry about the sustainability of U.S. fiscal policy but also the public at large, not to mention investors abroad. It is this shift that is crucial: a complex adaptive system is in big trouble when its component parts lose faith in its viability."

That "one day" is now.

For the sake of our country, I truly want your efforts to be successful and write today to offer some suggestions. It is impossible to know the outcome of your endeavor but I believe, at the very least, the commission must be a tool to educate the American people on the subject of our nation's dire fiscal situation.

The America people know that we need to look no further than the situation in Greece to understand what our future may hold if we do not make dramatic changes to control U.S. debt. They need and want to be involved in this process. Public involvement is critical to your success. The reality is that members of Congress will not support any of the commission's proposals without the full support of the American people. This cannot be just an inside-the-Beltway process.

Therefore, it is critical that the commission, in whole or in part, hold public meetings throughout the nation. The legislation I proposed with Jim Cooper required that at least one town hall style public meeting

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would be held in each of the nation's federal reserve districts. One meeting that is Webcast from Washington once a month is not adequate. To date, I am unable to locate any information concerning the working groups on your Web site. It is my understanding that the bulk of policy proposals will be developed during these working groups' closed sessions. At the very least, I encourage you to publicize and Webcast all commission activities, and publicly post meeting minutes and documents as soon as possible.

Secondly, I am very concerned that the commission has been structured in a manner that will make it difficult for you to succeed, and even doom it to failure. I cannot overstate the importance of your work. Your recommendations will define America's very economic future. It is curious, though, when considering the big picture of federal priorities, that you have been allocated \$500,000 to perform the singular task before you. Consider that the Obama Administration is currently spending over \$8 million on the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, even though it will issue its report after both the House and Senate have voted on financial reform legislation. Consider that the District of Columbia was recently reimbursed for \$4.4 million for overtime work by first responders at the two-day April Nuclear Security Summit. Consider that more than \$2 million in American taxpayer money is being spent to advocate for the adoption of the Kenyan Constitution. Your charter also notes that you have been authorized to hire the equivalent of four full-time staffers. Again, I believe that this is totally insufficient to your task. Just these few examples raise questions for me about the administration's commitment to this commission's work and whether this exercise is just for political cover.

Given your limited resources, I believe you should take advantage of the incredible talent pool available in the private sector to assist the commission in its work. A number of highly respected organizations have been deeply involved for a number of years in discussions to find solutions to our nation's fiscal crisis, including holding hearings across the country and talking with the America people to explain the unsustainable spending path we are on. I strongly urge you to embrace these groups, which I believe would be willing to be involved at no cost to the taxpayer.

Robert Samuelson said as much in his May 17 *Washington Post* column "Wake Up, America." The article is enclosed. I believe the American Enterprise Institute, the Aspen Institute, the Brookings Institution, the Concord Coalition, the Heritage Foundation, and the Urban Institute – organizations with years of experience in the very issues before your commission – would be receptive to any overtures. They all have a long track record of working together on fiscal issues.

I appreciate your consideration of my comments. Please do not hesitate to call if I may be of assistance to you in your endeavor of critical national importance.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:ml
enclosure

This is VERY IMPORTANT.

I thank you —